

Countdown

By JO3 Megan Moline,
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A 19-year-old Sailor puts on her steel-toed boots and looks at the clock. "Just enough time to get to the ship before my shift starts," she thinks. Her roommate is waiting at the door, with car keys in hand, ready to take the Sailor to work, as she usually does.

The day is long and tiring, as all days are when you're part of a pre-commissioning shift aboard an aircraft carrier. The young Sailor completes the shift and stands outside the gate, waiting for her roommate. Finally, the roommate appears, and, during the ride home, the Sailor starts talking about plans to get her own car the next day. After all, that newly acquired driver's license is burning a hole in her pocket.

At the local used-car lot, the Sailor settles on a white, 2001 compact after checking out all the offerings. Driving it home makes her feel free at last. There's one thing missing from her set of wheels, though: a CD player. When she gets home, she calls the dealership and persuades them to install one.

The next day, she's hurrying back to the dealership when she glances in the rearview mirror and sees the flashing lights of a patrol car. A check of the speedometer tells her she's hurrying a little too much. She pulls over and accepts a speeding ticket.

Her first drive to work in her car the following day is uneventful. The Sailor parks, then makes a mental note that she has to pick up base decals the next day. She also has to go back to the dealership to pick up some things. She doesn't know it at the time, but she won't live long enough to take care of these two items.

The Sailor is feeling extremely tired, and she blinks hard as she drives down the road. "Maybe I should have listened to my roommate's advice and taken a nap before going out," she thinks. "After all, it is a two-hour excursion to the Navy base and the dealership." Nevertheless, she pulls up at a

cash-flow machine and takes out money. She then gets back into her car, fastens the seat belt, and drives away...for the last time.

Ten minutes later, the white, 2001 compact car starts jerking from side to side before sideswiping a vehicle in the left lane. The compact momentarily returns to the right lane but then swerves left across a grassy median, spins into oncoming traffic, and collides with a second vehicle. The drama doesn't end, though, until another oncoming vehicle crashes into the driver's side door. A rescue technician pronounces the 19-year-old Navy woman dead at the scene from multiple trauma; meanwhile, two other people go to a hospital.

"Fatigue played a major factor in this accident," said AO1(AW/SW) Jeffery Costello of the ship's safety department. "The Sailor had relatively no experience driving her new vehicle and already had received a speeding ticket. She didn't listen to someone who was watching out for her. There were so many situations that could have changed—and thus prevented this mishap—but, in the end, we lost a great shipmate."

Navy photo by PH2 James Thierry

to Tragedy

Does your
command do
this?


As noted by Petty Officer Costello, USS *Ronald Reagan* offers an AAA driving course for all hands ages 26 and under. "Required Navywide, the course is offered at least once a quarter, but we hold it as often as there is a demand for it," he said. "A nice thing about the class is that some insurance companies give a discount to anyone taking it.

"Any junior member (E-4 and below) thinking about purchasing a vehicle first must run through a request chit," said Costello. "This way, a supervisor gets involved and can help with financial counseling or look into the dealership.

"Different states have different rules when it comes to driving; give yourself time to get used to the surroundings," said Costello. "If you're going to an unfamiliar area, read a map and try to find out

where you're going. Always wear your seat belt, no matter where you are—that's one of the most important things to remember when it comes to driving.

"Knowing your vehicle also is important," said Costello. "Always make sure it has the proper safety equipment, the tires are inflated correctly, and the oil level is normal. Make it a point to do all the little maintenance steps that people usually forget about.

"Vehicle safety is important for everyone. We have folders containing our safety briefs available for viewing 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Once a year, we have a commandwide safety stand-down. Individual departmental supervisors go over the briefs again as major holidays draw near. These supervisors have the biggest influence over junior personnel. They ensure their people understand all the safety aspects," concluded Costello. 

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